

Requiem for the bishop who travelled by dog sled

BY ARCHBISHOP JOHNSON

The parish church on the via Aurelia will never again be visited by so many Canadian bishops who occupied its pews on Tuesday afternoon, November 16th.

In addition to the Canadians were high-ranking prelates from France, a representative of the Canadian Embassy, in Italy, two Cardinals and the apostolic delegate to Canada.

All had come to attend the funeral Mass of Bishop Jean Louis Coudert, OMI, who suffered a fatal heart seizure on Sunday, November 14th. Their presence was a tribute to the missionary bishop of Whitehorse and the Yukon. The Father General of the world-wide Oblate community most kindly asked me to be the celebrant of a Concelebrated Mass. There were eight Oblate Bishops acting as concelebrants, two of whom were Archbishop Jordan and Bishop Routhier.

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Bishop Coudert and I were consecrated in 1936. He became Auxiliary to Bishop Buno of Prince Rupert. we have been brother bishops in British Columbia for more than 29 years.

Each of these years increased my admiration for this stockily built son of France who had chosen what one Pope described as « the most difficult missions in the world » to be the locale in which he would live, labour and die.

When the vicariate of Prince Rupert became somewhat organized he asked to be sent to the more primitive missions in the Yukon. During the last war he added to his responsibilities by accepting Cardinal

Spellman's invitation to be his military vicar-general to the American troops located in that region.

No outpost in that sometimes desolate area of ice and snow was too far away or too difficult to get to for Jean Louis Coudert. His great mind and heart were occupied not with distance or travel problems but with those living there — the sisters, the priests, the brothers and above all the souls of his people of God.

He told us once that he was much more comfortable in his dog-sleds than in auto or airplane. His successor will find that every mission trail is hallowed by the memories of this humble and saintly bishop.

Bishop Coudert somehow or other always found time to study. He read carefully and critically every document issued in the preparatory years of the Second Vatican Council. As requested by Pope John and Pope Paul he would send to the secretariate his valuable ideas and opinions. I received many copies of these transcripts and later saw many of his suggestions incorporated in Conciliar documents.

Much could be written about his amazing contributions to Catholic education and the success which attended his efforts to have the Territorial Government recognize Catholic School rights.

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Only one wish or prayer was denied him — to die in the missionary land he loved. However God in His paternal goodness wanted him to have a tribute that could not have been given in Whitehorse.

Never in our lifetime will so many bishops be together or available as here in Rome during the Council.

God permitted all of us to accord a prayerful farewell befitting one whose exemplary ministry was an inspiration and an invitation to follow in his footsteps. But the body of Jean Louis Coudert will forever rest in Whitehorse among his people, his friends, his wintry winds and the Yukon snows will become his pall.